

WASHINGTON--On January 16, 2008, Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) voted for the revised National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4986), a measure that was brought back to the House following the Presidential veto of legislation that overwhelmingly passed the House and Senate last December. — “I wore the cloth of the nation for 31 years in the United States Navy, and served alongside and in command of numerous men and women who have fought valiantly and selflessly in defense of their country. I am very disappointed in the President’s decision to compromise the funding and safety for our troops. A scheduled 3.5% military pay raise and bonuses, as well as critical veterans’ health care initiatives will be placed on hold, despite the overwhelming support of the legislation” said Congressman Sestak.

The President indicated his objection to a provision that would remove some immunity from governments designated as state sponsors of terror by the State Department. On December 28, 2007, the President vetoed the bill because it was claimed those provisions could allow plaintiffs to freeze Iraqi government assets in the United States as part of litigation over actions committed during the rule of former dictator Saddam Hussein. This came through pressure by the Iraqi government, through its D.C. lawyers, to withdraw \$25 billion worth of assets from the U.S. capital markets unless the president vetoed the bill.

Congressman Sestak vehemently disagreed with the President’s view to waive the right of service members who have been tortured in Iraq to attain their already won monetary judgment for torture that individuals sustained during the first Persian Gulf War (such as an aviator who was captured after he had been shot down).

“This is wrong. Under international law, even when a government changes, the new government is responsible for the actions of the government it superceded. Each month we spend almost \$12 billion for the War in Iraq, and because Iraq has now threatened to pull its \$25 billion invested in the U.S. market—the cost of two months of the war—the President is not going to support the men and women who wore the cloth of this nation that were tortured during a war, and have already won a judgment against the Iraqi government. This is wrong. We should have voted to override the President’s veto, supporting not just the men and women who are serving today by such items in the bill as the 3.5 percent pay raise, but also for those who served previously who have legitimately brought a claim against the Iraqi government because of torture. After Congressman Skelton, Chairman of the HASC, promised to move a separate bill to address the concerns I raised, I voted for the revised defense bill because of the need to support the remaining items which support our military in the overall bill.”

These are the same items that, on December 12, 2007, Congressman Sestak originally voted for and Congress passed. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (FY08), a legislation that represents a compilation of numerous vital provisions to protect of our troops, support of our returning veterans, develop military readiness domestically, and strengthen our security abroad.

This Defense Authorization Act authorizes \$696.4 billion for defense programs in FY 2008, including \$189.4 billion in emergency supplemental funds authorized specifically to support operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the general war on terrorism — although other funds in the bill will be used for such support as well.

“The delay of this defense bill will prevent the Defense Department from issuing special pay to soldiers, including enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses, which could harm recruitment and retention, said Congressman Sestak, “This act will delay some wounded-warrior provisions that increase pay and benefits for returning combat injured soldiers as injured soldiers’ family members were set to receive up to six months of paid leave without fear of losing their jobs as an expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).”

The National Defense Authorization Act will:

Support Our Troops

The FY 08 National Defense Authorization Act will provide funds to aide our troops both home and abroad. It funds for equipment such as body armor, humvees, vehicle add-on armor, Armored Security Vehicle, and protection systems to ensure that our troops abroad are provided with the equipment necessary for their missions. Furthermore, it authorizes funds for shipbuilding and aircraft development, combat systems, and information technologies.

Domestically, this Act increases the pay of the troops, improves healthcare services, and establishes multiple provisions to ease the burden on our military families, military retirees, and surviving spouses.

Iraq and Afghanistan

The FY 08 National Defense Authorization Act mandates regular reports highlighting progress, projected force levels, and planning in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq, the Act requires implementation of a registration and monitoring system for all defense items, including weapons, provided to the Iraqis. In Afghanistan, it establishes a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and requires a detailed plan for sustaining the Afghan National Security Forces.

Restore Accountability and Readiness

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 restores readiness in a time when it is most needed for our nation by authorizing funds for the Strategic Readiness Fund and National Guard equipment, while requiring reports on the current state of the readiness of the force, a plan on reconstitution of propositioned equipment stocks, and requiring rating and reporting of National Guard readiness for homeland defense missions. This will provide our nation the resources it needs to be protected at home while our military is stretched overseas.

This Act will also extend these accountability standards to private security contracts by requiring greater clarification of contracts, regulation, and management by relevant US agencies.

Help Our Veterans

The legislation creates provisions to aid the troops coming home from Iraq. This Act would create the Wounded Warrior Resource Center to service as a single point of contact for service members, their families, and primary caregivers. Furthermore, this Act would require inspections of housing facilities for recovering service members, a comprehensive policy on the care and management of members of the armed forces, and develop a electronic system of maintain health records.

Finally, this Act authorizes funds to strengthen and expand nonproliferation programs, particularly for programs focused on global WMD and nuclear threat detection and reduction. It establishes a bipartisan commission to analyze the appropriate role of nuclear weapons in the future, and includes several provisions aimed at strengthening energy efficiency and security.

More specifically, the Defense Authorization Act includes funding for:

Military Pay Raise — Provides 3.5% pay increase for military personnel in FY 2008, and extends certain special pay and bonuses for active duty and reserve personnel

Reserve & Guard Equipment — Provides \$6.7 billion for National Guard and Reserve equipment

Military Construction — Provides \$23.7 billion for military construction and family housing.

Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle — Provides \$17.6 billion for the vehicles, fully funding the military's stated requirement for 15,374 MRAPs

Future Combat Systems — Authorizes \$3.4 billion for the Future Combat System, the Army's

next generation of combat vehicles and weapons systems.

U.S. Troop Protection—Includes \$3.3 billion for up-armored Humvees, \$1.2 billion for personal body armor, and \$4.8 billion for improvised explosive device jammers.

Missile Defense — Authorizes \$8.4 billion for the Missile Defense Agency
Aircraft Funding—

- F-22A Raptor — \$3.7 billion to procure 20 F-22A fighters, equal to the request.
- F-35 Joint Strike Fighter — \$3.7 billion for development of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), and \$2.6 billion to procure 12 planes.
- F/A-18/E/F — \$2.7 billion for 33 next-generation F/A-18 E/Fs, the Navy's upgrade of the current F/A-18 C/D aircraft; and
- C-17 — \$2.5 billion for 8 unrequested C-17 cargo aircraft.

Shipbuilding Funding —

- New Assault Ship — \$2.8 billion in advanced procurement for the Navy's next-generation surface combat ship, the DD(X)
- CVN-21 — \$2.7 billion, as requested, for long-lead procurement of the CVN-21, the Navy's next-generation nuclear aircraft carrier scheduled to be delivered to the fleet in 2014
- LPD-17 Amphibious Ship — \$1.7 billion in procurement funding for one LPD-17 San Antonio-class amphibious ship
- Littoral Combat Ship — \$340 million for one Littoral (coastal) Combat Ship (LCS)
- New Attack Submarine — \$3.1 billion for procurement of the next Virginia-class new attack submarine, which will replace retiring Los Angeles-class submarines

The Defense Authorization Act also included two priorities introduced by Congressman Sestak to: 1) Give greater contracting opportunities to small businesses by requiring market research for Department of Defense contracts greater than \$1 million, and 2) have the Secretary of Defense develop a comprehensive policy to address traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other mental health conditions similar psychopathologies.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for

31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.